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Making commitments matter: young people's input to the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 58/133, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to consult with youth organizations and youth representatives on the evaluation of the progress made and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. A year later, the Assembly noted in its resolution 59/148 the ongoing efforts of the United Nations system to solicit input from young people for the review of the World Programme of Action and invited the Secretary-General to provide an overview of these contributions as a supplement to his report to the Assembly at its sixtieth session.

The present report responds to these requests as a synopsis of the inputs collected from young people, both through consultative meetings and in response to a booklet entitled "Making commitments matter: a toolkit for young people to evaluate national youth policy". This resource was published by the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs in 2004 to familiarize youth organizations and young people in general, with the proposals for action contained in the World Programme of Action for Youth, as well as to facilitate the collection of the above-mentioned inputs.

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I. Introduction and general recommendations

1. The present report summarizes the views, analysis and recommendations of young people concerning the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.[1] It includes their observations on the implementation of actions related to the 10 priority areas of the World Programme of Action since its adoption by Member States in 1995. It also considers the five additional issues of concern to young people that were noted by the General Assembly in 2003.

2. Consistent with the Secretary-General's World Youth Report 2005,[2] the views collected on these topics are grouped into three clusters: (a) youth in the global economy, which includes the priorities of hunger and poverty, education, employment, and globalization, (b) youth in civil society, relating to concerns of environment, leisure, participation, information and communication technology and intergenerational relations and (c) youth at risk, encompassing the priority areas of health, drug abuse, delinquency, special concern for girls and young women, conflict and HIV/AIDS. It is noted that some of these priority concerns span more than one cluster area. Thus, the clusters are not definitive categories, but rather a means by which to report on the 15 youth concerns identified by the General Assembly.

3. The views and analysis presented in the present report were gathered via a number of processes. These included consultative meetings with international and regional youth organizations and representatives, the first of which was hosted by the Government of Portugal, the Portuguese National Youth Council and the Municipality of Coimbra from 31 January to 4 February 2005; a second such meeting took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 14 to 17 February 2005. Additionally, the Intergovernmental Agency of La Francophonie organized a consultative process through its own network of francophone youth organizations, which culminated in a meeting of youth representatives from 23 francophone countries in Cairo from 27 to 29 May 2005.

4. National-level input was collected through the widespread distribution of a booklet entitled "Making commitments matter: a toolkit for young people to evaluate national youth policy", published in English, French and Spanish.[3] This toolkit was developed to familiarize young people with the proposals for action contained in the World Programme of Action for Youth and to solicit their engagement in its 10-year review. Young people were encouraged to examine priorities of greatest concern in their national or local contexts.

5. Almost 200 submissions were received in response to the toolkit, including input from youth organizations in Azerbaijan, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Finland, France, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, the Philippines, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Togo, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen and Zambia. This extensive response demonstrates the importance that young people attribute to the World Programme of Action for Youth and is evidence of their commitment to support its

10-year review. The original submissions contributed by young people are available, with permission, at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/youthspeak.htm.

6. Youth inputs related directly to the three aforementioned clusters are presented in the remainder of this report; however, several general observations and recommendations were also collected from the consultative meetings and submissions received in response to the toolkit. This includes the frequently noted observation that central to improving the situation of young people in the world is the fulfilment of their basic human rights. Young people recognize that in the past 10 years the international community has deepened its awareness of the rights-based approach to development. This approach should be integrated into youth policies in order to further reduce the social, cultural and economic inequalities that prevent the enjoyment of the basic rights of all young people.

7. Many young people also renew their call for the creation and implementation of cross-sectoral national youth policies that are developed in collaboration with young people and take into consideration local realities and the needs of specific target groups within the youth cohort. They equally support the improved monitoring and revision of the World Programme of Action for Youth. To that end, a number of young people support the enhancement of the United Nations system's capacity for better collection and coordination of data on the actual situation of youth worldwide, improving the framework for consultation with youth organizations and creating indicators to better monitor the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

8. Young organizations recommend that several of the priority concerns be treated as transversal themes in relation to other priority concerns addressed in the Programme of Action, rather than as topics in and of themselves. They acknowledge the importance of the five new issues of concern noted by the General Assembly in 2003 and believe that they are cross-cutting issues that should be seen in context of the existing 10 priorities. Young people underscore the critical need to form linkages between the World Programme of Action for Youth and the Millennium Development Goals in order to ensure that the needs of young people are better integrated into broader development agendas.

II. Youth in the global economy

A. Hunger and poverty

9. Submissions received from youth highlight the reality that many young people continue to live in poverty and hunger, especially in rural areas, where education and employment opportunities may be limited. In some countries, it is reported that young people experience a poverty rate above the average. Yet the concerns of young people are not always taken into consideration in national policies for poverty reduction, leading to incoherent and sometimes detrimental actions. Young people urge their Governments to cooperate with them in developing poverty elimination policies, including the development and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Information about existing poverty reduction efforts should be provided to young people so that they are better able to make use of the strategies currently in place.

10. Many youth organizations support the development of a global youth development index, following the success of the initial index developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Office in Brazil. The index could measure literacy, the rates of enrolment of students in secondary school, youth employment and the marginalization of specific youth groups.

11. Concern is expressed about the vulnerable position of young farmers, caused by the power of big landlords, the liberalization of economies (resulting in the import of agricultural products), the dumping of agricultural products and limited financial support from Governments. Further, it is stated that development aid for hunger and poverty does not always reach the poor, due to corruption and the mismanagement of funds. Young people affirm that they can assist in building democratic governance mechanisms, in order to reduce corruption and increase transparency and accountability.

12. In addressing poverty, young people emphasize the need to better integrate the principles of sustainable development, including respect for the environment and human rights. Most young people see education as a part of a lasting solution to poverty. As indicated in the World Programme of Action for Youth, the development of basic education and skills training for rural youth needs to be strengthened. It is also noted that livelihood options for young people living in rural areas should be diversified, by such means as building infrastructure, stimulating new branches of industry and promoting exchanges between rural and urban youth.

13. Additionally, young people highlight the need to invest in entrepreneurial activities for rural youth, e.g., by creating a fund for young rural entrepreneurs. In some countries, young people are encouraged by Government and NGOs to create local agricultural cooperatives or enterprises, supported by microcredit schemes. However, in most countries, young people have very limited access to land or credit. Some youth state that the entrepreneurial spirit should be developed in rural areas, but not exclusively in the agricultural sector.

B. Education

14. Youth organizations consider education an important life asset and the basis for their engagement in society. Although access to education has increased in some countries, many young people express concern about their countries' progress towards the Education for All goals.[4] The reasons identified include insufficient investment in public education institutions and infrastructures, regional disparities in educational infrastructure, unequal opportunities for girls and young women, the underappreciated role of teachers, the inability of families to afford to send children to school and a lack of recognition in many families of the importance of education.

15. Youth organizations are concerned that often-used phrases such as "the youth of today are the best-educated generation ever" may detract attention from the continuing need for high-quality education. There is a sense among young people that the quality of public education is gradually eroding in some parts of the world.

16. The rising costs of education, its privatization and the existing disparity in quality between public and private systems are a concern for many young people. While various countries have implemented free basic education, there is a sense that

it is of poor quality and inaccessible to many youth. Youth organizations urge countries to put in place policies and infrastructure that would allow free primary education for all, with specific attention to girls, poor people in urban and rural areas, street children, indigenous youth, youth with disabilities and refugees. They also ask Governments to invest at least 6 per cent of their national budget allocations in education, as suggested in the UNESCO report "Learning: The Treasure Within", of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, published in Paris in 1996. Further, Governments are requested to ensure, in accordance with article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that all young people have equal access to higher education, on the basis of merit and not of ability to pay.

17. The importance of alternative methods of learning, including peer-led education, long-distance education using information and communication technology and informal and non-formal educational activities is recognized, and their use is encouraged. Employers and Governments should recognize the skills and knowledge attained outside classrooms, often gained through the diverse activities offered by youth organizations. The democratization of educational systems and youth participation in educational planning are also considered to be important goals. Pupil and student councils can play an important role.

18. It is recommended that school curricula include life-skills training on topics such as HIV/AIDS, sex education, conflict prevention and active citizenship. Major importance is attached to the skills obtained through better use of information and communication technology. In many countries, access to computers and the Internet in schools needs to be established or expanded significantly. Various reports also express concern over obtaining the skills required by the current labour market. Young people ask that secondary and tertiary education be better linked to labour demands through activities such as vocational training, work placement and internships. Efforts should be made to ensure that these forms of work experience do not exploit youth.

19. In some cases, progress is reported in the promotion of cultural heritage and diversity — for example, by offering education in a student's mother tongue. Nevertheless, young people note with concern the increasing discrimination against ethnic minorities in some educational settings. Youth also recommend moving from data collection focused mainly on school enrolment to gathering information on school dropout rates. It is felt that this would assist in identifying the reasons why young people leave school prematurely and in formulating possible solutions.

C. Employment

20. Young people from around the world note that finding decent employment remains a major challenge. They express concern over the availability and quality of employment, particularly with regard to the informal economy, where most jobs offer few prospects, hazardous conditions and no social protection. This applies to both unskilled youth and many educated and skilled youth who are equally unemployed, underemployed or not employed in their area of study. Volunteer work should be valued and recognized as a valuable way in which youth can gain experience and skills to increase their employability.

21. Initiatives to address youth unemployment include tax incentives for companies to hire youth, financial assistance for self-employment, job-search centres, voluntary service programmes and training courses. However, young people feel that these measures have had limited impact because of a lack of information about the programmes available, services being too small in scale, corruption and nepotism, the absence of new jobs and policies that have yet to be implemented. National action plans and policies to address youth unemployment need constant commitment and greater resources from Governments, particularly via the work of the Youth Employment Network.[5]

22. Nearly all submissions stressed the need for greater support for youth entrepreneurship, including training and support mechanisms, microcredit and other financing schemes. The success of social entrepreneurship, which applies a business approach to a social concern, is identified as one underutilized solution for addressing youth unemployment. However, since youth feel that entrepreneurship is only part of the solution, they encourage youth employment policies to focus on both the supply and the demand side of the labour market. Governments must address the macroeconomic challenges of creating more jobs.

23. The private sector is seen as an important stakeholder in the education and employment of young people. Besides creating jobs, the sector can contribute through training, internship, and mentorship for entrepreneurs. Governments and the private sector must work together jointly to reach the goal of the Millennium Declaration[6] to create meaningful and decent employment for all young people.

24. Young people urge Member States to comply with internationally agreed labour standards, to ensure the fair pricing of commodities on the global market and to balance environmental integrity with economic growth.

D. Globalization

25. Young people concur that they both benefit and suffer from the ongoing integration of the world economy, agreeing that steps must be taken to mitigate the negative impacts of globalization. For this reason, many youth affirm a belief in "alter-globalization", described as an alternative approach to global development that is more democratic, fair and linked to global solidarity, instead of "anti-globalization". The views received raise concerns about the inequalities both within and between developed and developing countries. Young people are ready to work with their Governments to promote good governance, to find feasible ways to relieve the external debt of developing countries and to increase the effectiveness of development assistance.

26. Young people identify their regular participation in formal decision-making processes at all levels as a means to bring about equitable governance. They identify education and training for civic engagement as important for becoming active members of their communities and in the political, social and economic life of their countries. Youth organizations also call on each other for further collaboration regarding global issues.

27. Some submissions note a lack of tools to help young people better grasp and learn about processes related to globalization, particularly to support them in identifying opportunities provided by these developments. International exchanges

for study, work or volunteering are frequently given as an example of an effective way to learn about different cultures and languages and should be supported.

28. In terms of the negative aspects of globalization, young people point to the increased prevalence of a consumer culture among youth and express concern over the media's influence on their lives and values. Concern is also expressed over the large numbers of young people who migrate abroad to find employment and the resulting vulnerability of young migrant workers. There is also great concern over the increasing trafficking of young people and the crimes associated with this problem.

29. Further, young people are worried about the structural adjustment programmes that have an adverse effect on their lives, including the privatization of water provisions and education. In their view, companies have a responsibility to ensure that the benefits of globalization are shared equally. When working offshore, companies should build the capacity of local communities by hiring local staff and transferring technology and knowledge. The commitment and monitoring of the Government to this process is seen as essential.

III. Youth in civil society

A. Environment

30. The need to widen the discussion on the environment to incorporate the broader notion of sustainable development is a matter of almost universal agreement among young people. This is seen as particularly relevant for young people living in countries that are undergoing rapid growth through the expansion of industrial sectors. Several youth organizations report that ecological conditions in their communities are deteriorating, particularly with regard to air pollution and access to potable water, and they recognize the need to work in partnership with local and national authorities to identify and implement solutions. Young people also recommend that the proposals of the World Programme of Action for Youth be expanded to account for the significant impact that living in extreme poverty has on efforts to preserve environmental resources.

31. Youth also place great emphasis on the need to increase education for sustainable development through various channels, including formal education (structured school curricula), informal education (knowledge gained through daily experience, the media, personal interactions) and non-formal education (organized educational activity outside the established formal education system). This is especially critical given the effects of the escalating consumption patterns of young people on the environment, such as the depletion of natural resources, the consumption of energy and the disposal of waste. The direct and active involvement of youth organizations and networks in the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is seen as very important.

32. It is noted that several concerns related to the environment need more concerted action. This includes the effects of war and conflict on the immediate environmental surroundings of young people; the critical need to improve the provision of and access to safe drinking water; climate change; and the urgency of

working with youth to implement the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

33. Young people generally report that the proposal for action to enhance the role of the media as a tool for the dissemination of information on environmental issues has not been widely implemented. In-depth coverage of specific environmental issues is largely absent from public media, which continue to target youth primarily in terms of advertising and entertainment.

34. Because several environmental conventions, policies and programmes depend on national self-assessment processes and environmental audits, young people highlight the need to be involved in environmental consultations, monitoring and data collection. It is underscored that often children and youth are the most susceptible to environmental health hazards and must be included in the development of targeted policy responses at the national level.

35. In reference to the Programme of Action's proposal to strengthen youth participation in the protection, preservation and improvement of the environment, young people also feel that their role in the creation and implementation of ecological initiatives deserves greater recognition and support. The potential of youth to contribute to environmentally sound lifestyle choices and solutions is significant. Young people are committed to the principles of corporate social responsibility, as well as setting up environmental enterprises such as ecotourism and the wider adoption of "green" technologies.

B. Leisure

36. Many young people feel that the concept of leisure-time activities as presented in the Programme of Action needs to be expanded, as it is a critical component for personal growth. Important aspects of youth development, such as the role of volunteerism or spirituality, remain altogether unexamined in the Programme of Action. In today's rapidly changing societies, young people feel that it is increasingly important for leisure-time activities to provide support for addressing challenges such as promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing and living with HIV/AIDS, finding meaningful employment and addressing juvenile delinquency. The degree to which vibrant and active youth organizations depend on their members' volunteer time and support is also widely reported.

37. Many submissions stress that the resources allotted to ministries of culture or ministries of youth and sport are often reduced because of the host of other economic, social and political priorities on government agendas. Young people find this particularly distressing, given that leisure-time pursuits foster personal development, civic engagement, social and cultural integration, intercultural dialogue and tolerance, artistic creation, spirituality and religious observance, appreciation of cultural heritage, literacy and a host of other elements that are critical to inclusive and well-functioning societies. Young people generally believe that adequate planning and investment in public facilities such as libraries, theatres, sports venues, art studios and youth centres can yield great returns in terms of social inclusion.

38. The disparity between leisure-time opportunities for young people living in rural areas and those living in urban areas is often mentioned as a concern. Young

people note that while the Programme of Action proposes actions to ensure that access to quality leisure-time activities is integrated into rural and urban planning, this is not adequately reflected in most community development programmes and activities.

39. Furthermore, young people observe that the amount of time they can dedicate to leisure-time activities is largely dictated by economic circumstances. In several countries, access to leisure-time activities is limited by stark inequalities based on gender, religious affiliation, social and economic conditions and disabilities. Accessibility could be improved if youth organizations were involved in the development and management of leisure-time programming and resource allocation.

C. Participation in decision-making

40. Several of the views collected underscore the twofold benefit of including young people in decision-making processes. Too often the participation of young people is viewed solely as self-serving, without taking into account that it also has a wider social function and leads to stronger public policy and better governance at all levels.

41. Many young people feel that full and effective youth engagement in decision-making is a long way from being a common practice. Several national youth structures reported that it is still customary to formulate national policies without consulting young people, which often results in discrepancies between how young people view various issues and the related policy responses. Although there are increasing efforts to involve young people using consultative processes, these practices must become more participatory, inclusive and meaningful. Youth organizations also need financial support and capacity-building in order to better respond and coordinate their involvement in participatory processes.

42. Examples of effective youth engagement in decision-making and programme implementation ranged from undertaking joint research and information-gathering on a particular policy issue to multifaceted systems of co-management. It is suggested that Governments consult with youth organizations to identify and replicate existing practices relating to the full and effective participation of youth in the decision-making of their societies. Youth also note that diversity needs to be taken into consideration when involving them in consultations and decision-making processes. Special efforts must be undertaken to ensure that the views of young people with special needs, migrants, refugees, indigenous people and minorities are adequately incorporated.

43. Many young people recognize that better use of information and communication technologies can serve to enhance youth engagement, particularly in terms of access to information and the provision of forums for discussion. However, there was almost universal caution against an over-reliance on information and communication technologies to engage young people. New forms of technology should be used as a tool to enhance, rather than replace, current forms of youth engagement.

44. Recognizing the increasing demands on their time and the competitive nature of current labour markets, many young people point out that youth organizations are attracting constituents that are looking to build their skills and gain access to new

opportunities. Nevertheless, most youth feel that the majority of their peers are involved in youth organizations and other structures within civil society because they genuinely and passionately believe in the issues that concern their generation.

45. Young people find it imperative that all Governments honour their commitments to include youth representatives in their national delegations to meetings of the United Nations. A fundamental building block in this process is supportive national youth structures that can foster such representation and maximize the experience gained by youth delegates to these political platforms. There is a widespread call for greater support, both financially and politically, for both the creation and the sustained development of independent national youth councils.

D. Information and communication technologies

46. Recognizing their role as leaders in adopting new technologies, young people acknowledge the beneficial impacts of information and communication technologies (ICT) on their lives and the development of their societies. They describe ways in which new technologies are connecting them to other cultures, creating opportunities for their education, generating new types of employment, improving their access to information and changing their relationship with their Governments. Yet for the most part, young people are resolute in expressing the view that information and communication technologies create risks, as well as opportunities, for youth around the world.

47. Young people express concern that new technologies encourage autonomous leisure-time activities and may lead to isolation and pose difficulties for many young people to interact with others. Given that the Internet can also provide space for the promotion of pornography, prostitution and trafficking of young people, some youth encourage the establishment of Internet safeguards, recognizing the need for better information and peer education to support the appropriate use of new technology.

48. Lack of access to information and communication technologies is one of the biggest challenges that has to be tackled if new technologies are to improve the lives of young people and not to deepen the already existing divisions in the world. Young people confirm that the digital divide manifests itself not only at the international level, but also within countries, where access to information and communication technologies is highly unequal between urban and rural areas, youth and older people and young women and young men.

49. Young people highlight that particular attention is needed to ensure that solutions to the digital divide do not rest solely on acquiring the necessary infrastructure, hardware and software, but also involve increasing the skills needed to meaningfully harness new opportunities afforded by technology. Youth note that the ability to use information and communication technologies is preceded by the acquisition of traditional literacy. Increasing technological literacy must therefore be accompanied by measures to enhance overall levels of education.

50. Youth organizations are aware that the international community has widely discussed these problems during the World Summit on the Information Society, for which there was an active Youth Caucus working to promote youth-driven policy

inputs. Young people urge Governments to follow through on their commitment to overcome the digital divide within countries through ICT-for-development strategies and to move discussions to the financing of such e-strategies.

51. Additionally, young people stress that many youth-led initiatives assist in reducing the digital divide. As both creators and users of new technologies, young people must be included in national e-strategies. Above all, support for young entrepreneurs in the developing world, through education, financing, and mentorship, is critical to bridging the digital divide and fostering the creation of sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, youth highlight the importance of fair labour standards for young people working in the ICT industry, including areas such as hardware production, software development and call centres.

52. In terms of new technologies and education, young people commonly call for better incorporation of information and communication technologies into school curricula. Integrating multimedia textbooks, online research and student presentations with the assistance of new technologies can make learning more interactive and participatory and help students acquire the competencies needed for today's labour market. Many students note that teachers are often not as familiar with information and communication technologies as their students are, such that peer-to-peer education is used to enhance the quality of learning.

E. Intergenerational relations

53. It is widely noted that the long-term consequences of changing demographic structure and the "greying" of societies are often unknown to or not well understood by many young people. Much still needs to be studied in terms of the relationship and dependencies between different generations, and youth identify the need for broader dialogue on this issue.

54. In more than a few developed countries, youth recognize an ongoing demographic revolution, aspects of which include a growing share of older people as a proportion of the overall population, people living longer and families generally having fewer children. Concerns that current pension and social security schemes are not sustainable in the long term are prevalent and, in some instances, create tensions concerning resource allocation and service provision.

55. Few respondents report policies and programmes that exist to promote genuine dialogue, exchange and transfer of knowledge between generations. Those who do report such initiatives see them as quite positive, serving both ends of the age spectrum. For example, in order to meet the growing need for individualized attention in classroom learning, programmes exist in which older people provide classroom assistance to schoolteachers. Older volunteers work with students to explain writing mistakes, listen to them read aloud, play educational games and test their application of the lesson plans. Young people appreciate this type of programming, as it enables them to interact with older generations beyond activities related solely to care-giving.

56. In their submissions, young people also highlight the need to support healthier intergenerational relationships within families. Many youth observe deterioration in relationships between parents and today's adolescents. In some cases, the introduction of innovative technologies or new forms of media, or even the

increasing importance of higher education, means that young people feel that their parents cannot relate to their social context because it is entirely different from what they experienced during their own adolescence.

57. In rural communities, there are further complications when adolescents leave the village or agrarian community to seek secondary or higher education in the city. This disrupts traditional intergenerational patterns of socialization, as new forces of socialization influence young people. Often, young people choose to move to urban areas, either for employment opportunities or to retain their newly found independence, leaving a gap in the transfer of responsibilities for the land, the farm or the care of older family members.

58. Young people also point out that there can be negative consequences of intergenerational interaction. For example, cultural mores and traditional practices can subordinate the views of young people to those of their elders. This is particularly problematic for girls and young women when new cultural standards aim to affirm their equality and full participation, despite strongly held traditions that continue to subordinate their role in the family and society.

IV. Youth at risk

A. Health

59. Young people recognize that their health is directly linked to other priority areas in the World Programme of Action for Youth, principally poverty and hunger, education and the environment. While young people acknowledge some advances in health-care delivery and programmes, much work still needs to be done. Of particular concern are the lack of youth-friendly services, insufficient education and information, outdated and obsolete legislation, poor physical infrastructure and medical equipment, inadequate resource allocation to public health priorities and unequal access to services. Access to quality health-care services must be a top priority in order to improve the global situation of young people.

60. Young people point out that very few services are youth-specific, confidential, non-discriminatory, free of taboos and sensitive to cultural contexts. Health services could be improved if young people were more involved in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that these services were more relevant and accessible to their peers. Although there has been some involvement of young people, their full engagement is limited, particularly among young women and rural youth. The needs of girls and young women must be at the forefront of inclusive health services. For example, the provision of maternal health services, including emergency obstetric services, must be available to all young women.

61. Young people recommend that Governments integrate health education into the formal curriculum of education, paying special attention to highlight the differences between communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and non-communicable diseases. The provision of unbiased information on safe sex practices, on the full range of preventive measures, must be made widely available to all young people. This information could be delivered in the context of healthy lifestyle choices and is as important as education on nutrition, hygiene and physical fitness.

62. The promotion of health education on both basic hygiene and sexual and reproductive health should not be limited solely to schools and formal health-delivery systems. Young people themselves are agents of social change, and the non-formal educative projects and programmes of youth organizations serve to inform young people in dynamic, cost-effective and relevant ways. Youth organizations are indispensable partners for achieving the health-related development goals for young people.

63. Young people are also cognizant of the increasingly high rates of drug abuse and suicide among many communities and sectors of the youth population. There is a need for better awareness and understanding of mental health issues among young people and a need to work directly with them at putting in place preventive and supportive measures.

B. Juvenile delinquency

64. Young people recommend that Governments promote a culture of non-violence and crime prevention with a focus on life-skills education and positive self-development for offending juveniles. This should include training and services related to developing healthy self-esteem, conflict resolution, psycho-social competencies and civic participation. Many acknowledge that national youth policies and programmes support these important aspects of youth development, as they assist in discouraging young people from engaging in antisocial behaviour. Yet there is a need to scale up existing youth centres, recreational programmes and life-skills training. It is also recommended that law enforcement agencies consider young people as assets in preventing juvenile crime and that "youth desks" be created at formal law enforcement institutions to deal with youth cases.

65. Young people reiterate the point to Governments and the public at large that the great majority of young people are not engaged in crime. They stress that most current juvenile justice systems are more punitive rather than corrective, which is detrimental to rehabilitation. It is also felt that efforts should be focused on rehabilitating young people involved in crime and on supporting the practice of restorative justice.

66. Young people universally agree that there should be an end to capital punishment of children and young people, as laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Youth note that Governments in many countries still do not differentiate between petty crimes, violence and organized crime. Additionally, young people are concerned about the status of youth in prisons. Quite often when young people are arrested, they languish in police custody and are maltreated, denied access to lawyers and relatives and not held separately from adults. Youth are at risk of becoming hardened criminals when they spend long periods in the company of adult prisoners convicted of more serious crimes. Young people highlight the fact that imprisonment severely disrupts the education and work life of a young person and urge Governments to consider rehabilitation rather than punishment, which is more conducive to helping a young person become a responsible member of society.

67. In many countries young people have access to weapons. This can increase the possibility that disputes will lead to violence and endanger all people. There is a strong sentiment that Governments should work to promote legislation to control the

use and availability of guns and ammunition. Joint programmes in collaboration with young people may also be an effective way to minimize armed crimes.

68. Young people argue that to simply state that gangs are a youth problem does not acknowledge the fact that in many ways gangs are a result of the marginalization young people feel in society. They feel that poverty and changing social structures are two contributing factors to juvenile delinquency. The impact and effect of multiple oppressions and marginalization of young people must be acknowledged and accounted for in national youth policies and programmes. These multiple oppressions relate to, for example, gender; sexual orientation; indigenous youth; racial, cultural, and linguistic minorities; social status, such as class, ethnicity, nationality or religion; disabilities; youth living in occupied territories; youth affected by natural disasters; and immigrant, refugee or internally displaced youth. The link between social exclusion and concerns such as delinquency, drug abuse and conflict must be better reflected in policies and programme responses.

C. Drugs

69. Young people feel that there are many complex issues related to substance abuse, ranging from peer pressure and experimentation to social exclusion and psychological well-being. They urge Governments to approach the issue of substance abuse among youth by working with them to identify the root causes and to instigate integrated responses.

70. Young people are generally ambivalent about the legal drinking age. Some feel that establishing a legal drinking age tends to be arbitrary, as some young people behave responsibly enough to drink while others exceeding legal age limits do not. They suggest it would be more effective to teach young people how to make smart choices for healthy lifestyles. Young people note that schools and non-governmental organizations have been working to sensitize and inform youth about the harmful effects of alcohol and tobacco. Many argue that restrictions on the purchase of alcohol and tax increases are not sufficient to significantly deter those determined to purchase and consume alcohol.

71. Young people agree that Governments should regulate the advertising of tobacco and alcohol, especially directed at young people, to discourage the use of these products. Many agree that the harmful effects of alcohol and tobacco should be clearly displayed on labels. Stronger information campaigns directed at youth that counter the false allure of these products are much-needed. Many also state that parents have an important role in providing information and taking responsibility for the habits of their children.

72. Young people widely agree that youth-developed, youth-friendly educational programmes and policies are effective in convincing young people of the harm caused by substances. Peer-to-peer education, counselling and life-skills training should be encouraged to address substance abuse, as they serve to empower young people to make the right choices. Rehabilitated substance abusers are also highly effective in developing and participating in prevention programmes.

73. Young people report that the rate of substance abuse among street children and disadvantaged youth is typically high. Social integration programmes targeted at vulnerable groups must be available to help them develop life skills that would lead

to productive lives. Although levels of substance abuse may be lower in rural areas, it is observed that most Government programmes and policies do not reach these areas, and young people are at an even greater risk as these areas begin to urbanize.

74. A partnership between justice systems, schools, youth organizations, religious institutions, families and young people would greatly help efforts to develop a society free of the problems brought about by substance abuse. Coordinated efforts are needed at the national, regional and international levels to reduce the trafficking of drugs and illegal substances. Governments are urged to provide sufficient funding for meaningful projects to address the substance-abuse problem.

D. Girls and young women

75. Globally, young people agree that girls and young women face unequal treatment and discrimination. They note that despite considerable progress, gender equality among young people remains a pressing issue, particularly because attitudes towards women are formed during the transformational years of young adulthood. The media are often bound to promoting gender stereotypes that relegate women to being sex objects to sell products, and in many ways the current generation is more exposed than ever to negative stereotypes of women and their role in society.

76. Governments have done a great deal since 1995 to ensure the equal access and rights of young women to primary, secondary and tertiary education. However, young people point out that poverty, household gender roles, early marriages, a preference to educate males, school fees and related costs, and even the sense that boys get more attention in the classroom are issues that restrict girls' participation and retention in education.

77. Young people recommend that programmes be increased to sensitize communities and parents about the importance of education for girls. Re-entry policies should be promoted to encourage girls and young women, including young mothers, to return to school and continue their education. Incentives and funding opportunities should be provided to NGOs and youth organizations to initiate non-formal education activities that target girls and young women. Where activities already exist, Governments should replicate and scale up such initiatives. Some urge greater support for single-sex programmes for girls and young women to increase their opportunities to develop as individuals and reach greater empowerment.

78. All Governments are urged to recognize the sexual and reproductive rights of women, including the right to control their fertility. Access to reproductive health services to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy is still limited, seriously undermining young women's equality in all aspects of life.

79. Young people consider the education of boys and young men on gender equality to be imperative. Young people note the lack of a gender approach to sexual and reproductive health policies and interventions, leading to the false belief that young women are solely responsible for sexual health and contraceptive methods.

80. Women continue to face discrimination in the labour market, and this remains a major issue for young people. Governments are urged to promote and ratify the International Labour Organization Convention on equal pay for equal work. In many parts of the world, women are still relegated to gender-stereotyped roles, such as

secretaries, clerks, nurses, and teachers, which generally remain low-paying jobs. Theoretically, young women have the same access as men to all sectors, but in practice women often encounter difficulties when they want to enter a male-dominated sector. Youth note that even if political parties, public institutions and private companies reach a certain "acceptable" number of women in boards, committees and other decision-making structures, there is still a barrier impeding women from taking leading positions within many structures.

81. Gender-based discrimination, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, pre-birth gender selection and female infanticide, sexual abuse and exploitation, honour crimes and other harmful practices against women remain key concerns for young people. All Governments are urged to develop, review and modify discriminatory legal mechanisms in order to protect girls and young women against sexual, physical and psychological violence.

82. Young people are seriously concerned with the increase in human trafficking and prostitution of women and urge that additional measures be taken immediately. Young women and girls, often the victims of poverty, unemployment and social inequality, are lured into these activities by promises of lucrative jobs, marriage brokers and tourism agencies. Although prohibited by law in many countries, young people remain at widespread risk of trafficking and prostitution.

E. HIV/AIDS

83. The increase in HIV infection rates, especially among young women, remains a serious concern. They note that HIV/AIDS affects young people differently in the North and the South, and that it is an issue affecting all aspects of development. Youth note that several countries have strategies to deal with HIV/AIDS; however, most national policies fail to address the effects of the pandemic on youth.

84. Young people universally agree that education on HIV/AIDS is crucial to fight the epidemic. They note that many young people lack accurate and adequate information about the disease, although the number of those who can correctly identify the means of transmission and prevention is increasing. They commend Government programmes that promote HIV/AIDS awareness in schools. Life-skills training, behaviour modification techniques and peer education policies and programmes that have been successful in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention should be scaled up and replicated. Young people recommend that Governments support youth-designed and youth-led sexual and reproductive health-training and outreach activities because they reach more young people and have greater impact.

85. Young people feel that there is a need to increase the levels of partnership between Governments, United Nations agencies and programmes and civil society, including youth organizations, in the areas of programme formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Governments are called upon to simplify procedures for gaining access to funds available for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Young people state that they would like to see faith-based organizations play an active role in disseminating accurate information on preventing and treating HIV/AIDS.

86. Governments should develop appropriate policies for high-risk groups and promote a comprehensive package of appropriate services for injecting drug users, including needle and syringe exchange programmes and referrals for treatment.

87. Governments and civil society must increase their efforts to end stigmatization of and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS, ensuring their rights to higher education and employment. Success stories of young people with HIV living healthy, fulfilling lives should be showcased, through an eminent panel of young people, to give hope to others living with the disease.

88. Young people note that women are often at greater risk of HIV infection due to their biological susceptibility, cultural norms, sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking. Women are often unable to negotiate the terms of sexual relationships. Programmes should be developed for women and men that aim to effectively empower girls and young women to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS.

89. Young people feel that much needs to be done to change Government health workers' attitudes in order for more young people to freely have access to these services. They call for Governments to provide accessible treatment, free and confidential counselling and care for people living with HIV and AIDS.

F. Conflict

90. Globally, young people feel that they are extremely vulnerable to armed conflict, whether caused by civil strife, drug wars or ethnic hostilities, the last sometimes being transmitted intergenerationally. Conflict, it is noted, denies human development and further restricts opportunities for young people. Governments are urged to promote and protect the rights of young people in areas of conflict, especially those rights related to self-determination, to ensure that all young people live in democratic, secure and peaceful societies. Many youth organizations encourage Governments to uphold the right to conscientious objection for young people not wanting to engage in armed conflict.

91. Young people universally condemn the exploitation of children in State-led or non-State conflict. Numerous organizations call on Governments to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children In Armed Conflict. They urge Governments and civil society to undertake serious disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration measures for former child soldiers and young combatants. Additionally, they call for special measures to protect girls and young women, as they are more vulnerable and often remain targets of sexual violence.

92. The crisis of refugees and internally displaced young people and the loss of basic human rights as a result of armed conflict is a cause of concern to young people. Young people state that partnerships should be fostered between organizations working in conflict areas and youth groups to ensure that conflict-affected youth, including refugees and internally displaced young people, are supported in the peacebuilding and conflict-resolution process.

93. Education geared towards peace, conflict prevention and reconciliation should be included in national school curricula. Young people state that they can be effective peacemakers and peacekeepers; however, this potential is rarely recognized in reconciliation efforts. Youth who have experienced the realities of

conflict can serve as inspiring voices to promote the culture of peace and conflict prevention.

V. Conclusion

94. The extensive response from young people to the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and Beyond indicates its continued importance to their lives. Through the solicitation of inputs for the present report, a great deal of interest and commitment has been generated at both the regional and national level. Youth organizations, intergovernmental bodies and other stakeholders are committed to increasing awareness of the World Programme of Action, not least through working directly with Member States on its implementation.

Notes

[1] See resolution 50/81.

[2] A/60/61-E/2005/7.

[3] Available at www.un.org/youth.

[4] See A/52/183-E/1997/74.

[5] For more information on the Youth Employment Network, see resolution 57/165; see also www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/yen.

[6] See resolution 55/2.